



MICHIGAN

For Immediate Release

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Small Business Weighs In on Proposals to Modify Ballot Initiatives

NFIB members favor changes for signature gathering but not Constitution

Lansing (March 5, 2013) – The **National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB)** today told the House Elections and Ethics Committee that an overwhelming percentage of its members, all small business owners, support efforts to clamp down on Michigan's signature gathering process for ballot initiatives but not changes to the state Constitution. The Committee was holding a hearing on House Bill 4046 that would place restrictions on petition gathering for ballot proposals.

"Small business owners agree that the emergence of professional signature gathering companies have made it easy for any special interest with deep pockets to get their proposal on a statewide ballot.," said **NFIB State Director Charlie Owens**. "They support restrictions on the process but they do not want to address it by changing the right to petition as provided in the state Constitution."

When asked if it should be illegal to pay someone on the basis of how many signatures they gather for ballot petitions 79 percent of those surveyed said YES, 15 percent said NO and 6 percent were undecided. A large margin of 96 percent agreed that paid petition circulators should be required to wear identification badges that disclose who is paying them while only 2 percent said No and 2 percent were undecided.

However, when asked if the Michigan Constitution should be amended to make it more difficult to place proposals on a statewide ballot, 45 percent said NO, 35 percent said YES and 20 percent were undecided.

"Small business owners are worried that efforts to restrict the ballot process within the Constitution could end up stifling the check and balance provided by the petition avenue," said Owens. "I think it's safe to say that they believe the authors of the state Constitution wanted citizens to have the means to keep the state legislature and governor in check with the initiative process and that there is no need to make any changes to the concept."

To view question and survey results go to:

<http://blog.nfib.com/2013/02/25/will-small-business-support-changes-to-michigans-initiative-petition-process/>

For more information about NFIB, please visit www.nfib.com.

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National Federation of Independent Business - Michigan State Ballot 2013

2013 Michigan Ballot Initiative Petition Process Question

Changes to Michigan's Initiative Petition Process

Should it be illegal to pay persons on the basis of how many signatures they gather for petitions aimed at qualifying a proposal for Michigan's statewide ballot?

79% Yes

15% No

6% Undecided

Should paid petition circulators be required to wear identification badges that disclose who is paying them?

96% Yes

2% No

2% Undecided

Should the Michigan Constitution be amended to make it more difficult to place proposals on a Michigan's statewide ballot?

35% Yes

45% No

20% Undecided

Background: Michigan's Constitution allows citizens to initiate legislation and also repeal existing Public Acts by gathering a required amount of signatures within a prescribed time frame and putting the proposed legislation, or rejection of current legislation, on a statewide ballot for a vote of the people. Citizens are also allowed to amend the Michigan Constitution in a similar manner. The required signatures for each effort are based on a percentage of the total votes cast for governor in the preceding election. In 2012 there were six ballot proposals put before voters through this process. Some are saying that Michigan should pass laws to place restrictions on how these signatures are gathered, including outlawing the practice of paying someone a fee for each signature obtained.

Supporters of placing restrictions on the signature gathering process claim that in recent years professional signature gathering companies have made it easy for any special interest with deep pockets to get their proposal on a statewide ballot. They point out that every one of the six proposals that were on the ballot in 2012 were assisted by advocates using paid petition gathering firms and that these firms pay workers a dollar amount for every signature they obtain. Supporters of restricting this practice say that the authors of our current state Constitution intended this process to be for real citizen grassroots efforts with unpaid volunteers, not a profit opportunity for signature gathering firms and a chance for well heeled interests to buy there way into our initiative process.

Opponents fear that efforts to restrict the signature gathering process are an attempt to stifle free speech. They argue that politicians are just worried about citizens having an avenue to reject or change their bad laws and policies. Opponents of placing restrictions on the signature gathering process say that the authors of the state Constitution wanted citizens to have an effective means to keep the state legislature and governor in check with the initiative process and that there is no need to make any changes. They claim that there is an equal opportunity for all interests to use the initiative process and that if advocates for a certain proposal want to use a paid signature gathering method to obtain the required signatures then that is appropriate and legal.